

## Education

This contribution is posted on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), a collaborative project of six partner organizations: Action Canada for Population and Development, Akahatá – Equipo de Trabajo en Sexualidades y Géneros, the Coalition of African Lesbians, Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA, India), the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, and the Federation for Women and Family Planning (Poland). The SRI aims to advance human rights related to sexuality, i.e., sexual rights within global policy processes. [www.sexualrightsinitiative.com](http://www.sexualrightsinitiative.com)

Through this submission the SRI would like to highlight the links between adolescents' sexual rights and education. Gender-based discrimination, social control over girls' sexuality and sexual abuse lead to high drop out of girls from formal education systems. Discrimination against and humiliation of gender non-conforming and transgender children causes them to drop out as well. In South Asia, for example, intersex children are often given away to *hijra* communities who, facing social ostracization, live in poverty and are kept out of formal education systems. Gay and lesbian students across the world face harassment, discrimination and violence in educational institutions, leading to poor education and health outcomes.

The absence of comprehensive, evidence-informed education on human sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and gender equality results in perpetuation of gender-based violence and discrimination. It also inhibits adolescent girls' access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. Furthermore, there exist legal and administrative restrictions to adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, such as statutory rape laws and parental consent regulations for access to health services, including contraception, STI prevention, HIV testing and counselling and abortion. As a result, early pregnancy and childbearing are prevalent and, along with lack of support services, cause girls to forego their education. Moreover, there are educational institutions that expel pregnant girls and do not allow their return after childbirth. Stigma around HIV results in denial of educational opportunities to children living with HIV.

The full range of adolescents' sexual rights needs to be guaranteed, consistent with their evolving capacities, in order to enable their access to quality education. The legal, policy and administrative barriers to adolescents' exercise of their right to sexual and reproductive health must be removed. Wide-ranging public education programmes are necessary to eliminate gender stereotypes, change restrictive gender norms and promote intolerance of gender-based violence. Laws must prohibit gender-based discrimination and all forms of gender-based violence, and their enforcement must be prioritised. Policies and programmes must be developed with the participation of girls and must utilize a gender perspective in order to benefit girls, for example, providing adequate and

segregated fully functioning sanitary facilities in schools, and enabling retention in school of adolescent girls that get pregnant.

Children and adolescents must be provided comprehensive sexuality education, according to their evolving capacities. Effective sexuality education must go beyond biology to educate children and adolescents about gender equality, healthy and positive aspects of sexuality, relationships, gender-based and sexual violence, sexual and gender diversity, healthy emotive processes, informed consent and human rights. It should promote empowerment and autonomy by including structured opportunities for adolescents to practice life skills they will need to be able to make free and informed choices about their sexual lives and to explore their attitudes and values. Such education must be free of and aim to eliminate stereotypes, discrimination, and stigma; must respect the evolving capacities of children and adolescents; and must be tailored to meet the specific needs of particular groups e.g. children with disabilities and those living on the streets. Such education must also be secular since often religious fundamentalisms permit and/or promote discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Further, it is important to recognise that certain groups such as girls, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) adolescents, adolescents with disabilities and adolescents living in poverty face disproportionate violations of their sexual rights and to ensure that comprehensive sexuality education programmes are reaching them, including through implementation in both formal and informal settings. Peer education programs should be supported in both settings; with design aspects of long-term training, regular supervision and community involvement these are found to be effective in empowering adolescent educators and reaching marginalised communities of adolescents. Further commitment and action are needed in order to ensure that all children have access to high quality, comprehensive and evidence-informed sexuality education.

Whatever format the post-2015 development framework adopts, it must prioritize process and approach, particularly a human rights-based approach, rather than deliverables, outcomes and numbers. Policy and programmes must prioritize marginalized communities, a number of which have been highlighted in this submission. Mechanisms for participation and accountability must be established and strengthened, and adequate resources allocated to enable these efforts. Accelerated efforts by States to realize everyone's sexual rights, including adolescents', must be prioritized within the post-2015 agenda.